

SBI continues mission of training church leaders

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expressed in its mission statement: "... to educate men and women called to serve in various church ministries and leadership roles."

That St. Bernard's continues to educate men and women — and survived to the century mark — belies predictions that predated even its opening, Father Falcone observed.

"When (Bishop Bernard) McQuaid in 1891 said he wanted to have a school of theological education, there were only five other such schools in the United States," Father Falcone noted. People at the time thought a diocese so small could never make a go of it, he said, adding, "It was called 'McQuaid's folly.' From the beginning it's been under some kind of a shadow."

The "shadow" grew longer in 1981 when St. Bernard's board of trustees announced that the seminary would close. But from the seminary emerged St. Bernard's Institute, which serves the church's ongoing need for trained leaders.

In educating men and women for leadership in the church, the institute simply continues the mission set out by Bishop McQuaid.

Bernard McQuaid determined to build a seminary in Rochester following an 1879 visit to Rome, Father Robert F. McNamara noted in his 1968 history, *St. Bernard's Seminary: 1893-1968*.

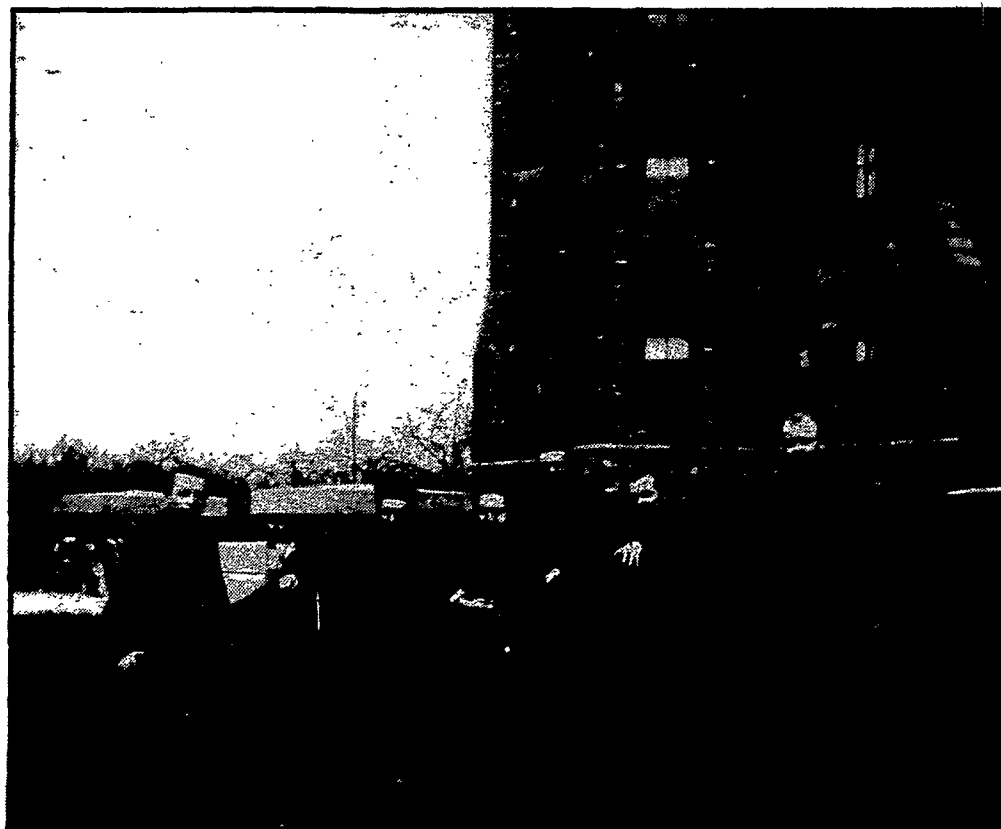
"Even his closest friends tried to dissuade him from embarking on so apparently disastrous a course," Father McNamara wrote. "But once he made up his mind, he would not be moved. And in the end, the 'I-told-you-so' was his, not theirs, to utter."

The seminary was dedicated Aug. 20 — the feast of St. Bernard — and on Sept. 4 of that year, the first 39 students arrived, Father McNamara wrote.

Between 1893 and 1981, St. Bernard's trained some 2,700 men who were ordained to the priesthood, Father McNamara reported in a March 23, 1989 article in the *Catholic Courier* ("Diocesan seminary's history reflects societal trends"). Of those men, 25 were later consecrated bishops and three became archbishops.

But St. Bernard's focus, much like that of the church, began to shift in the 1960s, Father McNamara observed in his *Courier* article. Indeed, changes made at that time planted some of the seeds that enabled St. Bernard's Institute to emerge from the seminary.

The first lay students were admitted



Courtesy St. Bernard's Institute
Members of the first faculty at St. Bernard's Seminary were (from left) Fathers Prosper Libert, Edward J. Hanna, Andrew B. Meehan, Ludlow E. Laphman, Andrew J. Breen and James J. Hartley.

in 1966. Soon women began studying at the seminary, with Sister Gratia L'Esperance, RSM, becoming the first to earn a degree — a master of divinity — in 1972.

Ironically, Bishop McQuaid himself broke barriers when it came to women at St. Bernard's — though he was motivated more by their housekeeping abilities rather than their academic skills.

Father McNamara's history of the seminary records that Bishop McQuaid arranged for lay women to perform domestic duties at the seminary — something that was unheard of at the time.

"Of course," Father McNamara wrote, "he was widely criticized for this policy as a perilous one. But the Bishop would answer vigorously, 'If in the seminary the presence of women is suggestive of evil to a student, it will be so after he leaves the seminary. Such a young man should avoid the priesthood or withdraw to a Trappist monastery.'"

Meanwhile, in 1968, St. Bernard's joined a local theological consortium, the Rochester Center for Theological Studies, with Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall. Thus, the seminary began a working relationship with other denominations' schools.

In 1981, when the seminary closed, St. Bernard's Institute located at the divinity school's 1100 S. Goodman St. campus. Today, SBI's student body is evenly divided between men and women. And students from the various denominational schools on campus may cross-register for courses offered by other schools.

That relationship is one of the strengths of St. Bernard's Institute, noted Karen Higman, SBI's director of development and public relations.

"We have a great window into the other groups that are studying here," she remarked. "You get a different kind of perspective."

In addition, Higman noted, the student body is diverse, encompassing different ages, educational backgrounds and reasons for studying — ranging from personal enrichment to pursuit of professional degrees leading to careers in church ministry.

"We are in a whole new era in terms of education of the laity," Meder re-

marked. "There are less priests, so there's certainly an increasing role for a number of lay people to serve in the church. But there's also a need for lay education to help their understanding of the church."

"One of the things I've been discovering is a lot of prospective students are individuals who are not necessarily looking to work for the church," acknowledged Georgia Crissy, SBI's director of student recruitment.

The Albany extension program illustrates the existence of such demand, noted Sister Margery Halpin, RSM, the program's director.

"When we started, we thought we might get three or four people who would get degrees," Sister Halpin said. But in 1993 alone, 20 students will complete their master's degrees at the Albany program.

Even more people attend the courses seeking knowledge and personal growth, not degrees and jobs in the church, she added.

"It was a pleasant surprise, and an obviously much needed service that had been untapped," Sister Halpin said.

"We're trying to get out the idea that this is no longer a seminary," Crissy said. "(The current students) are just normal folks. We have lawyers, we have drug counselors studying here. They come from a wide background."

And those students are the future of the church, Sister Halpin observed.

"These are people who are very committed to the church," she remarked. "These are people who are interested in nourishing their own faith and hence the faith of the church to which they belong."

"I think," Sister Halpin concluded, "they are going to steer the direction of St. Bernard's and the church."

Society schedules day of prayer

CHICAGO — The Catholic Church Extension Society is sponsoring the fifth annual Day of Prayer for the Faith of Our Children April 25.

This day is set aside for Catholics nationwide to pray for America's young people, especially for those whose faith is weak or whose attendance is poor, according to Father Edward J. Slattery, president of the Chicago-based Extension Society, who established the prayer day.

"Many young people are faced with more destructive forces than their parents and grandparents ever had to consider when they were young, such as drugs, alcohol and promiscuity. We must both pray and act because the greatest number of poor people in America are children. Young people today need our care and God's special grace," he said in a statement about

the day.

Church leaders throughout the country have expressed support for the idea of praying for young people.

"There is no greater concern facing the church today than the spiritual well-being of our youth. I pray for the success of this important day," said Bishop Thomas J. O'Brien of Phoenix in a statement.

Bishop Andrew J. McDonald of Little Rock, Ark., said he would promote the day throughout his diocese, saying it was a "wonderful opportunity to call attention to our people about the need for prayer for children."

To celebrate the day of prayer, Father Slattery will be principal celebrant of a Mass that will be televised by the Eternal Word Television Network at 2 p.m. EDT.

Prior to the Mass broadcast, EWTN will air at 1:30 a special half-hour program featuring five young Catholics in a panel discussion about their views of faith and the Catholic Church.

Father Slattery said the television special was produced by the Extension Society and EWTN in anticipation of Pope John Paul II's visit to Denver for World Youth Day.

"The Holy Father's trip to Denver is a special moment, but we also must remember to pray for the youth of our country long after the World Youth Day," he added.

The Extension Society, a national organization, raises funds for needy missions in rural and impoverished areas of the United States.

Anita Anissi, D.D.S.

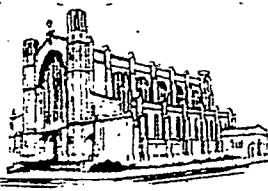
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